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ABSTRACT

A program of teacher training that encourages graduate students in speech communication to develop an independent and inquiring style of teaching is outlined in this paper. The program described involves three phases: first, a preinstructional workshop designed to reduce the anxiety of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) about instructional duties, to introduce GTAs to educational problems they will face and to methods and resources for coping with those problems, and to acquaint GTAs with available university resources; second, a series of lecture/discussions on instructional topics and opportunities to learn about teaching via performance and observation; and third, a summary of the term's experiences that leads to developing a plan for future improvement of teaching skills. (AEA)

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A Program for Improving Graduate Student Teaching

On March 29, 1979, 66 Americans from 20 states and the District of Columbia gathered at Arden House, Harriman, N.Y., for the Fifty-sixth American Assembly--The Integrity of Higher Education. For four days, representatives from the college and university world, the legal profession, government, business, foundations, and service organizations discussed the response of our colleges and universities to internal and external pressures on their governance process and the effects of that reponse on their moral and intellectual integrity. At the close of their discussion, the participants issued a statement concerning American higher education and a list of thirty-two recommendations for immediate action. Recommendation 25 reads: "For future members of the academic profession, specific attention should be given to the development of teaching skills as part of graduate school programs."[1]

The legitimacy of this recommendation is substantiated by the claim of Change Magazine that, despite some excellent programs (e.g., University of Michigan, Indiana University, University of California, Harvard, Stanford), the training of teaching assistants remains an area of general neglect.[2] In fact, when Carroll reviewed the literature on the effects of training programs for university teaching assistants, he was limited to 85 reports, the majority of which were descriptions of training programs.[3]

The failure to adequately train graduate students for teaching creates both short and long term difficulties for higher education. Currently, between one-fourth and one-half of the total undergraduate teaching load is handled by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) pursuing graduate degrees.

Within speech communication, Gibson et al. conclude that the number is increasing: "In 1974, the data clearly demonstrated that the basic course was taught by faculty representing all academic ranks; in 1979 approximately three-quarters of the teaching was done by graduate assistants or junior faculty with a decrease in the percentage of teaching by senior staff members."[4] As a result, many students get their only exposure to college level speech communication (as well as math, chemistry, history, etc.) from individuals mastering the art of teaching via a sink-or-swim philosophy. Compounding this problem is the fact that the majority of GTAs eventually accept positions on academic staffs where their major function is teaching (only twenty percent of them will ever publish so much as a single article).

The argument, then, for making meaningful teacher preparation and experience an integral part of graduate programs is a powerful one. The goal of this paper, therefore, is to outline a program of teacher training for graduate students which we believe successful. Unfortunately, as with most such claims for success, our claims are impressionistic rather than data based. Excellent advice on how to obtain such a data base is provided by Carroll.[5] In the meantime, we offer the following program as one worth implementing and testing.

The program involves three phases. Phase one, which is preinstructional, consists primarily of a workshop designed to: (1) reduce GTA anxiety about instructional duties, (2) introduce GTAs to educational problems they will face and to methods and resources for coping with those problems, and (3) acquaint GTAs with university resources that are available to them. Phase two is simultaneous with the GTAs first term of teaching and consists of lectures/discussions on instructional topics and the opportunity to learn about teaching via performance and observation. Phase

three involves a summary of the term's experiences and the creation of a plan for the future improvement of teaching skills.

While the ingredients of the three phase program are continuously modified on the basis of experience, the program itself is guided by three assumptions about teaching:

1. Effective teaching is a complex skill that can be improved by providing guided practice and knowledge of results;
2. Since research suggests that there is no one "correct" way to teach, GTAs must have the opportunity to experiment with alternative instructional strategies so that they may discover those that work best for them and thus develop their own individual style of teaching; and
3. Instructors will be able to teach better if they are familiar with research literature dealing with learning, motivation, organization and presentation of subject matter, individual differences in learning abilities, and other materials related to classroom instruction.

The goal of the program, then, is to encourage teacher behavior which reflects an inquiring and independent style of teaching. The remainder of this paper details the three stages of the program.

Phase One

Pre-service orientation begins with the mailing of a packet of materials to each GTA at the time of appointment. The packet includes copies of the textbooks for the course, a syllabus, a handbook for instructors, and a variety of materials related to college teaching.

During the week before the term begins, a workshop for GTAs is conducted. While varied in length, the most standard format involves three four-hour afternoon sessions. Typically, these sessions are conducted on the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday afternoons preceding the first day of classes. The content of the workshop varies somewhat depending on workshop

length and the nature of the workshop participants. During the first day of the workshop, the facilitator should obtain an assessment of each GTA's level of teaching expertise and attempt to gear a program to meet his/her needs. Some time should be devoted to the following issues:

1. How does the department define the role of the GTA?
2. What is the philosophy of the course in which they will teach?
3. What is the nature of the assignments for which they will be responsible?
4. How is the text to be used?

These are pragmatic issues, and very important, and must, therefore, be shared with GTAs before they enter the classroom.

In an earlier paper we outlined potential activities for a three day workshop.[6] Here we describe a small number of similar activities. The first is designed to determine how the GTA conceptualizes the teaching role. To facilitate this, GTAs are placed in dyads and asked to generate a list of characteristics necessary for an ideal teacher. Once completed, each list is placed on a blackboard (any medium that will display each dyad's list will do). Common themes are identified and a master list, reflecting a synthesis of the group, is generated. Typically this procedure yields two types of teacher characteristics: (1) those concerned with content (i.e., knowledgeable) and (2) those concerned with people (i.e., open minded). Based upon the final list of characteristics, GTAs are asked to rate themselves on a five point scale from (1) most like me to (5) not like me. GTAs then discuss their self evaluation in terms of implications for teaching.

A second activity asks GTAs to diagnose a variety of video taped teaching situations. These trigger tapes (developed at the University of Michigan) portray problem situations like (1) introductions during the first

day of class, (2) an office meeting between a GTA and a troubled student, (3) a classroom situation with a high verbalizer, (4) a classroom situation with a hostile student, and (5) specifying assignment goals. After each tape, GTAs discuss options for coping with the situation reflected in the tape. Based upon group discussion, a strategy for best dealing with the situation is hypothesized.

A third preinstructional training strategy involves developing skill in questioning techniques. GTAs are asked to read literature on the use of questions in teaching and Blooms taxonomy (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation).[7] Since a major portion of an instructor's interaction involves some type of questioning activity and since questions serve as a stimulus for eliciting student involvement in the learning process, it is important that the GTA becomes aware of the ways in which s/he can improve his/her questioning techniques. After studying literature on questions, participants work on identifying and producing various levels of questions.

A fourth preinstructional strategy involves micro teaching. Research indicates that instructors participating in micro teaching demonstrate improvement in a variety of teaching skills.[8] Thus, GTAs are required to identify a concept or principle and teach one 5-7 minute micro lesson. If time allows, more than one micro lesson is taught during the workshop. The micro lessons are video taped so GTAs can receive visual feedback on their teaching performance. If video tape equipment is not available, an audio tape recorder could be used instead.

Additional topics for the preinstructional workshop include classroom management techniques, instructional strategies, test development, assigning grades, etc.[9]

Phase Two

Phase two involves two types of activities. First, students are introduced to the research literature on college teaching. A good source of such information is Wilbert J. McKeachie's Teaching Tips.[10] Topics covered in either seminar or brown bag session include:

1. A model and a philosophy for higher education
2. The role of goals, purposes, aims, and objectives as guides to instruction and learning
3. Characteristics of students--as individuals and groups--which should be known or assessed for use in planning instruction
4. Emerging characteristics of the college and university environment which are relevant to instruction
5. Methods of instruction
6. Media and materials of instruction
7. Evaluating the effects or outcomes of instruction
8. Evaluating the course and the instructor

The second ingredient of phase two utilizes such elements as guided practice, observation, modeling, and feedback to allow GTAs to sharpen their teaching skills via self inquiry. Two examples of this approach involve the application of ASD and interaction analysis. For example, GTAs are assisted in evaluating themselves on the 54 item ASD.[11] The ASD assesses seven traits which are important to classroom teaching: (1) social warmth, (2) social abrasiveness, (3) ego organization, (4) introversion/extroversion, (5) anxiety, (6) individualism, and (7) social attractiveness. The GTA can evaluate herself/himself using each class section as a referent; scores on each dimension are discussed in terms of implications for teaching. These evaluations should be used several times during a term.

A second strategy involves training GTAs in the use of interaction

analysis. When used as a training device, knowledge of an interaction system like Flanders can help teachers develop (1) more indirect methods of relating to students, (2) a better use of questions, (3) more positive reinforcement to students, and (4) higher levels of learning.[12] Bondi, for example, found that teachers trained in a modified Flanders system significantly differed in their use of 13 forms of verbal behavior from those not trained in interaction analysis.[13] The results indicated that teachers trained in interaction analysis: (1) used more praise, (2) accepted and clarified student ideas more, (3) used more indirect teacher talk, (4) used more extended praise, (5) had more extended use of student ideas, (6) used more positive affective talk, (7) accepted student ideas more after teacher-initiated teacher talk, (9) used less corrective feedback, (10) criticized students less, (11) asked more questions, (12) used less lecture, and (13) gave fewer directions.

A second type of interaction analysis, if adapted to the college level, can provide insight into the ways in which a teacher interacts dyadically in the classroom.[14] Other interaction systems tap the interaction between a teacher and the class as a whole, presuming that interaction with the total class reflects the way in which a teacher interacts with each individual student. Good and Brophy argue that teachers interact differently with different students and a knowledge of these differences is important for a teacher to know. This system can be particularly helpful in determining how teachers communicate different performance expectations to students. Other questions that can be addressed are:

1. Do teachers treat male and female students alike in equivalent situations?
2. Does student behavior influence teacher behavior?
3. Do some students receive little or no teacher contact?

4. Do some students receive predominantly negative comments from the teacher?

The system can also provide an index of the quality and frequency of interaction students share with a classroom teacher. Techniques like Flanders which encourage more indirect forms of teaching and Good and Brophy which illustrate dyadic interaction patterns can be very important in helping the GTA process and improve upon teaching behavior. Numerous additional systems are readily available.[15]

Phase Three

The final phase of the training program takes place at the conclusion of the term and involves planning for the continued improvement of teaching skills. With the data collected during Phase Two, the course director/facilitator and the GTA jointly identify teaching strengths and weaknesses. An action plan is then outlined in which GTAs specify teaching behaviors they desire to maintain and the teaching behaviors they desire to change. A plan for approaching this task is devised and a method is developed for the measurement of the change.

Footnotes

[1] "The Integrity of Higher Education," Final Report of the Fifty-Sixth American Assembly, Columbia University. March 29-April 1, 1979 Arden House, Harriman, N.Y., p. 9.

[2] A Handbook for Teaching Assistants: How to Succeed as a New Teacher. Change Magazine Press, 1978.

[3] J. Gregory Carroll, "Effects of Training Programs for University Teaching Assistants: A Review of the Literature," American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada, March 27-31, 1978.

[4] James Gibson et al., "The Basic Course in Speech at U.S. Colleges and Universities: III," Communication Education, 29 (January 1980).

[5] Carroll.

[6]

[7] Richard L. Carner, "Levels of Questions," Education, 83 (May 1963), 546-50; Ned A. Flanders, Analyzing Teaching Behavior (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1970); F. Hunkins, Questioning Strategies and Techniques (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972); F. Hunkins, Involving Students in Questioning (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976); and Norris M. Sanders, Classroom Questions: What Kinds? (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

[8] Robert W. M. Travers, ed. Second Handbook of Research on Teaching (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), 951-4.

9

[10] Wilbert J. McKeachie, Teaching Tips: A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher. 7th ed. (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath, 1979).

[11] Donald J. Veldman and George V. C. Parker, "Adjective Rating Scales for Self Description," Multivariate Behavioral Research, 5 (July 1970), 295-302.

[12] Flanders.

[13] Joseph C. Bondi, Jr., "Feedback from Interaction Analysis: Some Implications for Improvement of Teaching," Journal of Teacher Education, 21 (Summer 1970), 189-96.

[14] Jere E. Brophy and Thomas L. Good. Dyadic Interaction: A Manual for Coding Classroom Behavior (Austin, Texas: The Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, The University of Texas at Austin, December, 1969).

[15] Anita Simon and E. Gil Boyer, eds. Mirrors for Behavior III: An Anthology of Observation Instruments (Wyncote, Pennsylvania: Communication Materials Center, 1974); and M. J. Galton, British Mirrors: A Collection of Classroom Observation Systems (University of Leicester, School of Education, 1978).

Footnotes # 6 and # 9 have been deleted. The reference is to:

Gustav W. Friedrich and Robert Powell, "Workshop for Graduate Teaching Assistants," Improving College and University Teaching, 27 (Fall 1979), 171-3.

11